

### Alcohol Use

Alcohol is the most commonly used psychoactive substance during adolescence. Its use is associated with motor vehicle crashes, injuries, and deaths; with problems in school and in the workplace; and with fighting, crime, and other serious consequences (1). Heavy, episodic drinking or binge drinking, in which five or more drinks are consumed on one occasion, increases the likelihood of negative outcomes.

■ In 1999 one-half of high school students (48 percent of female students and 52 percent of male students) reported drinking in the previous 30 days. Twenty-eight percent of female students and 35 percent of male students reported binge drinking.

■ Current drinking and binge drinking increased significantly between grades 9 and 12 for both male and female students; the increase was sharper among male students.

■ For many students, initiation of drinking began before high school. Almost one-third (32 percent) of students reported that they first drank alcohol (more than a few sips) before age 13 (2). Male students were more likely than female students to begin drinking before age 13 (37 percent compared with 27 percent). Researchers have found that the younger the age of drinking onset, the greater the likelihood that an individual will, at some point in life, develop a clinically defined alcohol disorder (3).

■ Current drinking among non-Hispanic black male and female students was substantially lower than among non-Hispanic white and Hispanic students. Non-Hispanic black students were significantly less likely to engage in binge drinking than their non-Hispanic white and Hispanic counterparts.

■ Reduction in the proportion of adolescents engaging in binge drinking of alcoholic beverages is a Healthy People 2010 critical adolescent objective. This measure is also a Leading Health Indicator (4).

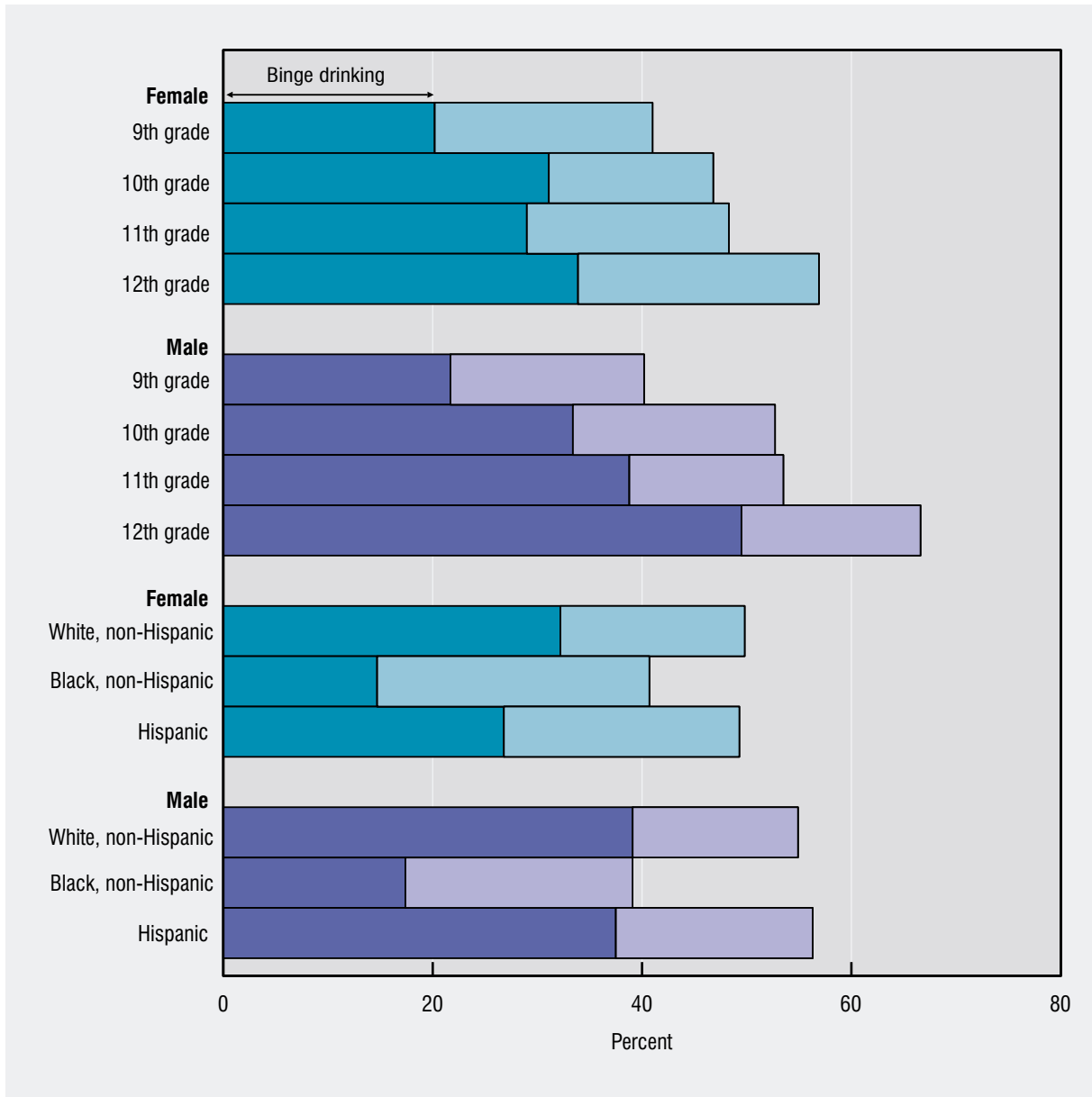
■ Adolescents who combine drinking and driving are at an increased risk of injury or death. In 1999, 13 percent of high school students reported that in the

previous 30 days they drove after drinking alcohol (2). Thirty-three percent of high school students reported that in the previous 30 days they rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol (2); reducing this proportion is a Healthy People 2010 objective (4).

### References

1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Ninth special report to the U.S. Congress on alcohol and health. Secretary of Health and Human Services. Bethesda, Maryland: National Institutes of Health. (NIH Publication No. 97-4017). June 1997.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 1999.
3. Grant BR, Dawson DA. Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *J Subst Abuse* 9:103-10. 1998.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes). Washington: January 2000.

Figure 27. Current alcohol use among students in grades 9–12, by sex, grade level, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999



NOTES: Current alcohol use is defined as having 1 or more drinks on 1 or more days of the 30 days preceding the survey; binge alcohol use is defined as having 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion in the 30 days preceding the survey. See Technical Notes for survey methods. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).